



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
PROGRAM PLANNING AND INTEGRATION
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

APR 28 2008

Dear Reviewer:

In accordance with provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), we enclose for your review the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for Proposed Authorization of the Makah Whale Hunt. The document is also accessible electronically through the NMFS Northwest Region's website at <http://www.nwr.noaa.gov/Marine-Mammals/Whales-Dolphins-Porpoise/Gray-Whales/>.

The action considered in this DEIS concerns the Makah Indian Tribe's February 2005 request to resume limited hunting of eastern North Pacific (ENP) gray whales (*Eschrichtius robustus*) in the coastal portion of the Tribe's usual and accustomed fishing grounds (U&A), off the coast of Washington State, for ceremonial and subsistence purposes. The Tribe's proposed action stems from the 1855 Treaty of Neah Bay, which expressly secures the Makah Tribe's right to hunt whales. To exercise that right, however, the Makah must obtain authorization from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) under the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the Whaling Convention Act.

This DEIS, prepared pursuant to NEPA, considers various alternatives to the Tribe's proposed action. To develop the full range of action alternatives – five in total – NMFS considered the principal components associated with a hunt, including: the time when whale hunting would occur; the area where whale hunting would occur; the annual and five-year limits on the number of whales harvested, struck, and struck and lost; cessation of whale hunting if a predetermined number of identified whales (i.e., included in a photographic catalog of whales from the Pacific Coast Feeding Aggregation area) were harvested; and the method of hunting. NMFS developed these alternatives with input from NMFS staff, the Makah Tribe, the cooperating agency (i.e., Bureau of Indian Affairs), and oral and written comments from the public.

Written comments on this DEIS should be submitted through mail, fax, or electronic mail to the Responsible Program Official identified below. Written comments submitted during the agency's 60-day public comment period must be received by July 8, 2008. When submitting fax or email comments include the following document identifier in the comment subject line: 2008 Makah DEIS.

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Sincerely,

Rodney F. Weiher, Ph.D.
NOAA NEPA Coordinator

Enclosure



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